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SUBJECT: SHIFTING ALLEGIANCES AMONG SLA AND JANJAWOOD

REF: KHARTOUM 01776
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11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Some rebel and political leaders on the ground in Darfur are signaling a shift in the current political climate where by some support for Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) faction leader Abdelwahid al-Nur is shifting to Ahmed Abdelshafie and whereby some Arab militias (encouraged by the rebel movements) are abandoning the Government of Sudan (GoS) in favor of greener Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) non-signatory pastures. If predictions by SLA reps in El Fasher prove true and the SLA factions in Juba announce their consolidated political and military structure by November 30, then we run the risk of seeing a commensurate response in the security situation, which most contacts on the ground, especially in the absence of functioning ceasefire monitoring mechanism, expect will be violent. END SUMMARY.

SLA UNIFICATION EXPECTED IMMINENTLY

12. (SBU) In separate conversations with FieldOff on November 21, 25 and 26 in El Fasher, representatives of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)/Khalil Ibrahim, representatives from the SLA factions of Abdulwahid al Nur and Ahmed Abdelshafie, the Darfur Forum and the El Fasher Native Administration discussed recent trends emerging among the SLA and janjaweed in the wake of the Sirte peace talks and in the run-up to UNAMID deployment. All agreed that the unification of the SLA faction allied to Abdelshafie, some member of SLA/Khamis Abdullah, and other minor SLA factions, per the ongoing process in Juba, was imminent, with the SLA/Abdelshafie rep predicting that an announcement on the political and military structure of the emerging group could be announced o/a November 30. Once this announcement is made, the group will approach the African Union/United Nations Joint Mediation Support Team to voice its concerns about timeframe, venue and negotiation methodology for subsequent rounds of peace talks. "Our aim is to avoid the mistakes of Abuja," the Abdelshafie rep explained.

13. (SBU) Regarding splinter groups, most reps agree that none of these factions poses a significant threat to SLA unification. SLA faction leader Khamis Abdullah was dismissed as isolated (with his forces defecting to Abdelshafie's ranks) and lacking in ground strength. (Note: Per Ref. A, SLA/Khamis Abdullah's supporters have split between the faction allied with Abdelshafie and the other group in Juba. End note.) JEM and Darfur Forum reps also agree that JEM/Idriss Ibrahim Azrag and JEM/Collective Leadership Banda Abu Garda have insufficient vehicles and soldiers to pose a credible threat. (Note: Sensitive reporting and UN/AU contacts report that JEM/Collective Leadership maintains a formidable military capacity, which JEM/Khalil Ibrahim has an interest in discounting. End note.) JEM rep speculates that the GoS will seek to exploit the weaknesses of these groups by offering its support to them (something which most rebels consider it is doing already) as part of a broader divide-and-conquer strategy against the SLA. Representatives of the

JEM, SLA/Abdelwahid and SLA/Abdelshafie shared Ref. B assessment that SLA/Unity of Abdullah Yehia and JEM/Collective Leadership would consolidate their movements, given their shared experience in Haskanita, which JEM attributes squarely to this alliance.

14. (SBU) The SLA/Abdelshafie rep does not consider, however, that such a consolidation will serve any faction well. He explained that neither Khamis nor Yehia would agree to disband their respective factions and to abandon their positions therein in favor of creating a clean SLA slate. The first leader who had volunteered to do this, he said, was Abdelshafie, who he expects to assume the political leadership of the reconstituted SLA. (Note: Credible reports indicate that Abdelshafie's political and military influence in Darfur is limited, despite assertions from his supporters. End note.)

"HE WHO SPEAKS FOR THE PEOPLE WILL WIN DARFUR"

15. (SBU) The founder of the Darfur Forum, a Fur and a traditional SLA/Abdelwahid supporter, was unambiguous in his assertion that he "does not see a future for Abdelwahid." He says that Fur intellectuals in particular no longer support Abdelwahid because "he is leading us nowhere and is causing us to lose our lands" as a result of what the rep considers Abdelwahid's opportunism and his quest to serve only his own interests. The rep continued that Abdelwahid's voice "is cooling down in the IDP camps," where IDPs are "shocked" by his refusal to attend Sirte talks. The longer Abdelwahid stays outside the political process, the rep warns, the less faith IDPs will have in him so that even if he were to attend subsequent negotiations, "it wouldn't do him any good." SLA/Abdelshafie rep advised against the international community's affording excessive attention to Abdelwahid's recalcitrance, warning that to do so would only encourage other rebel leaders to follow suit.

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16. (SBU) In a surprising reversal, the Darfur Forum chief stated that the intellectuals of the SLA are now firmly behind Abdelshafie, who they consider open-minded and supported by strong SPLM ties. He, like the SLA/Abdelshafie rep, claims the IDPs, especially in Kalma, are turning from Abdelwahid to Abdelshafie, bolstered by lobbying efforts by the Abdelshafie faction to get word out in the camps that Abdelwahid is not the only one making contributions to the Darfur process. "He who speaks for the people," the chief declared, "will win Darfur." (Note: A generational divide exists between Darfur's elites--represented in the Darfur Forum--and the region's youth, which has resulted in considerable resentment among IDPs for the traditional leadership. End note.)

17. (SBU) Dimlig (a Fur word for district chief) General of the El Fasher Native Administration, however, disagrees that Abdelshafie is that spokesperson. He refutes the theory that IDP sentiment is shifting toward Abdelshafie, insisting instead that Abdelwahid is still fighting for the rights of Darfur people and is right to hold out for UNAMID deployment to ensure IDP safety before committing to participate in peace talks. "The IDPs have already waited four years for peace," he explained, "and they can wait another two." [NOTE: There is often a disconnect in perceptions between those representatives on the ground who are involved closely tied to El Fasher political life, such as the head of the Darfur Forum, and those who with more traditional ties to the populations on the ground, such as the Native Administration rep. END NOTE].

JANJAWOOD DISENCHANTMENT DRIVING THEM TO SLA

18. (SBU) Despite differences of opinion about the leadership of SLA, one common theme among all groups was the reality of Janjaweed disillusionment, which is now driving Arabs (mostly of the camel-herding Rizegat and mostly in northern North Darfur, southern South Darfur, El Geneina and Kabkabiya) to "desert" their government benefactor and to seek alliances with the very DPA non-signatories they were originally instructed to persecute. Fear of persecution is a justification given by the JEM and SLA factions for this janjaweed defection: fear of persecution by the International Criminal Court and by UNAMID are the most commonly cited, and other

rebels speculate that these "converts" are trying to get a piece of the Darfur reconciliation pie before peace talks proceed any further.

¶9. (SBU) According to JEM and SLA reps, these Arabs are tired of unfulfilled GoS promises of money, land, posts in Native Administrations and integration into the SAF, police and NISS (and are evidently vulnerable to JEM and SLA/Abdelshafie intimations about GoS manipulation), and they are making their demands known to the GoS. In what reps on the ground admit is a first-time occurrence in the Darfur conflict, janjaweed fighters are seeking refuge among the ranks of the very groups they were once ordered to attack, including the SLA. The SLA and Native Administration, which represent the Fur populations, regard the janjaweed defectors with a healthy dose of skepticism, stating that these groups must "prove their sincerity" before confidence and trust can be rebuilt within the IDP populations to welcome these elements into SLA ranks. A healthy dose of paranoia pervades as well: Fur tribe members suspect the GoS is using certain of these Arabs to "infiltrate" rebel ranks and destroy the rebel movements from the inside out.

¶10. (SBU) For its part, the GoS is reportedly taking measures to protect against the potential threat of janjaweed turncoats. The JEM rep claims the GoS is on the lookout for new recruits (whom he called "mujahedin") and has 12,000 military IDs ready to distribute to them among the three Darfur states, as well as 500 military positions earmarked for them at the rank of Major and above.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT. It is hard to know how much of the rhetoric surrounding SLA shifting allegiances is accurate, as all factions and groups are positioning themselves as robustly as possible ahead of rebel consolidation in Juba and ahead of resumption of negotiations with the GoS. However, one thing that all groups did not dispute was the janjaweed convert trend. While it is hard for many of these rebels to resist the urge to use conspiracy theories to explain this trend, given their violent history with these janjaweed fighters, it is worth noting that the SLA might even consider joining forces with them. Whether SLA motives behind their decision to entertain this possibility are entirely genuine (a true "spirit of comprehensive reconciliation") is another question. We have not yet seen significant Janjaweed fighting alongside SLA forces on the battlefield (although rumors are rife that this is imminent), so for now this is all speculative. END COMMENT.

¶12. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.

FERNANDEZ